

Field Diary: Climate Change and Water Management (iAdapt)



Posted by Ansu Alexander in [Public Policy Advisory](#)

To learn about this IDRC grant funded project on Integrated Rural Urban Water Management for Climate based Adaptations in Indian Cities (iAdapt), click [here](#).

Purpose of the Field Visit

As part of the Semester 1 milestone, we had to identify the most vulnerable catchment out of the 7 delineated catchments. To do this, a baseline collection of socio-enviro-economic information of the Vijayawada rural and urban catchments was conducted through focus group discussions and assessment of floral species through quadrat sampling.

Vijayawada: The Climate Context

Nestled along the banks of the river Krishna, the city of Vijayawada has long been content with their water resources. While other cities in the country struggle to acquire water from far and wide to fulfill the needs of their city, Vijayawada is endowed with the luxury of an exclusive surface water source. But now, with the burden of having to be the primate city in divided Andhra Pradesh, Vijayawada, a city known for its agrarian activities is transforming into a service and industrial hub. This wind of change instigated an increase in urbanization and migration, which when coupled with the threat of climate change hovering over our geographies, could potentially lead to a rise in temperature rising temperature. This could result in changing patterns of precipitation, rising sea level, storms, floods and fresh water scarcity. Having realized that it was time for the city to act, Athena started tapping at the doors of various government offices with suggestions to build the adaptive capacity of the city through interventions in water resources management.

A Stamp of Approval: Kick-starting the Project

After receiving the blessings from the Krishna District Collector and Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner, we were ready to develop an understanding of the problems and perceptions on the ground. Having recognized that cities are not closed systems but are interdependent (and surrounding rural areas), we kept our study area as Vijayawada city and its surrounding rural catchments. We therefore decided to conduct the baseline survey from rural to urban, starting from the villages and culminating at the city. The survey instruments which were chosen were primarily Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with citizens, In-Depth interviews with government officials (ID) and Quadrat Sampling at open spaces in the villages.

Boots on the Ground: Mobilizing Village Respondents

On a bright and sunny morning in Vijayawada with our sharpened field tools, we were driving through the surrounding villages inhaling the fresh air and aroma of the paddy being cultivated in the rain-kissed soil. Our first stop was to meet the *Mandal*¹ officer, who after being briefed about the project, helped us shortlist villages which met our criteria and connected us to the respective village *panchayat*² president and secretary. Tailing behind these village leaders, we reached the village and was introduced to the *sarpanch*³. The medium of communication had now shifted to Telugu, creating a time-lag. While the *sarpanch* was mobilizing people, we were treated to chairs and water in the community hall of the village. Having restricted the participants to 15 people inclusive of both men and women, our FGD group turned out to be either female dominant or male dominant. When the majority were males, the females opted to be subtle onlookers until urged to speak up, while if the majority were females, the men remained quiet. While our Qualitative Expert was moderating the FGD, I was hastily taking notes to supplement the voice recorder, despite my limited knowledge of the language. We concluded with a vote of thanks, and after the group disbanded, we were offered a traditional Andhra Pradesh meal.



Village Exploration: Searching for Biodiversity

Post lunch, accompanied by the *panchayat* secretary/*sarpanch*, we went onto our next task, with the sun blazing at its highest peak. With our faces draped in cloth, leaving just enough to see, we hunted for open spaces having representation of the natural bio diversity of the village. With ropes spread out on the selected piece of land, we started counting the frequency of the different tree and plant species. This triggered villagers to come out in apprehension, as if we were here to rob them of their land: but thanks to the company we had, the purpose was elucidated. In many villages, working as a team with the villagers, we were easily able to identify between different species. This FGD and quadrant sampling iteration went on for about 8 villages around Vijayawada city until we were content with the samples from the villages.

Moving on to the City

Now that we were through with our village survey, we moved on to capture evidence from the city. With the backing of the Additional Commissioner (Projects), we approached the community development officer of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation who connected us to ward level community officers. We visited 7 slums in the city where we conducted FGDs with the self-help group members and the Corporators. Sitting in circles in the community halls of the slums, intense discussions filled the room, with people using this opportunity to convey their grievances to the Corporator, their representative in the corporation. Among these discussions the most distinctive were those in the slums along the river Krishna – tales of those who experience the river, both in its splendor and temper.



Meeting Government Officials and Closing Phase One

Having concluded our phase one engagements with the citizens, we moved on to meet lower rung government officials who are aware of the ground level operations. We enlightened the officials about the projects objectives and conducted an in-depth interview with them to understand their perceptions on the necessity of climate change adaptiveness. Over these discourses, we gathered some valuable insights and developed a good relationship with them, which we hope will augment the multi-stakeholder platform we aim to build during the project.

The communities – both rural and urban – as well as the government officials, had many insights to share on climate issues, which formed a firm ground to advance our research project. Apart from the intelligence gathered from the field, we have also have accumulated invaluable experiences which will stay with us for the duration of this 3 year project.

Footnotes:

1. Administrative division within a district
2. Village council
3. Head of a village

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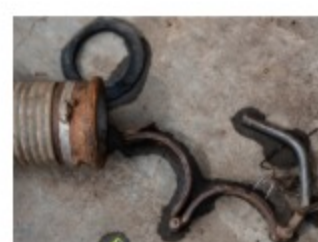
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About Ansu Alexander

Ansu's interests include Spatial Planning, Participatory Planning, Social Development, Housing for the Urban Poor, Urban Livelihoods and Public Transportation. She has a bachelor's degree in Urban Planning and a master's degree in Urban Policy and Governance.

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